

Memorandum

To: Dr. Joel D. Boyd, Superintendent of Schools
From: Robin Desmond, Chief Academic Officer
Date: March 30, 2022
RE: Response to Motion and Departmental Update



The following memorandum is in response to the motion by Jacqueline Doherty:

Motion to request to have a third party audit around mental health services to our students.

The Office of Teaching and Learning is currently engaged in a comprehensive assessment and redesign of the District's mental health services and social emotional learning programs given the increased need of students following the COVID-19 shutdowns and the significant increase in staffing and other support resources which have been instituted across schools.

On March 16, 2022, the School Committee approved the posting of a Director of Mental Health/Behavior/SEL and that posting is scheduled to close on April 1, 2022. An audit of the District's mental health services will be conducted as a part of the incoming Director's entry and transition process to provide the newly formed department access to critical information that will support the strategic development of this department. A Request for Proposal (RFP) for an external vendor to conduct the audit will be finalized and released concurrently with the interview process for the Director position.

LPS is focused on scaling up the operation and impact of our school-based mental health screening and response systems to support our students' social emotional, behavioral, and mental health needs. Over the past few years, LPS has focused efforts on selecting and implementing tier I social emotional learning curriculum. This investment has resulted in the hiring of a Social Emotional Learning Coordinator, the purchase of a social emotional learning curriculum for grades K-9 and the DESSA tool to measure students' social and emotional competencies. These steps have provided tier I support for all students.

This year, with the support of a state mental health grant, LPS will be investing in data infrastructure and staff coordination to increase our support through implementation of an evidence-based universal mental health screener, operationalizing our Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) developing tier II and III support across schools and the build out of a Mental Health and Wellness and Social Emotional Department. The proposed actions will grow our capacity to provide proactive, culturally responsive, and appropriate care to urgently and equitably address the mental health crisis we face.

The Director of Mental Health/Behavior/SEL will lead the Mental Health and Wellness and Social Emotional Learning department in the development of a comprehensive system for district-wide mental health services to be implemented in every school. Working with department and school-based staff, the Director will analyze existing initiatives in SEL curriculum and screening to inform the MTSS coordination framework, engage the SEL task force of district, school-based, and community partnership to collaboratively define and refine systems and procedures. In Year 1, the Director will:

- 1) Strengthen schools' capacity to implement and monitor tiered supports and interventions working with department and school-based staff.
- 2) Conduct a bid process to identify a community agency provider to coordinate school-based supports for mental and behavioral health needs in high need sites with guidance from social work and community school staff
- 3) Work with a team to vet and select a universal mental health screening tool to pilot
- 4) Ensure social-emotional learning and behavioral health practices, policies, and supports are culturally-responsive, equitable, and implemented with fidelity across sites

The grant will also support the hiring of a Mental Health/Behavior/SEL Support Specialist with a background in student services and data systems management to assist schools in a standardized coordination of screening results and targeted support for students in Tiers I through III. The Specialist, along with the Coordinator of Social Emotional Learning, will facilitate the existing SEL task force of school-based staff and community mental health providers to guide implementation to ensure our coordinated screening and response framework 1) includes user-friendly, sustainable data systems to collect, analyze, and report on universal screening data; 2) enables school-based staff to monitor the students' progress and response to supports and interventions; and 3) complies with applicable state and federal laws regarding data security and privacy. In addition, the Support Specialist will work with the team to select and pilot a high-quality universal mental health screener vetted by school-based clinicians.

Department of Mental Health and Wellness and Social Emotional Learning Organizational Chart

